

Nominator's Statement

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When I nominated my teacher, Chuck Kleinhans, for the SCMS Pedagogy Award I expected my letter to be one amongst many in a deep basket—a basket rich in history, not just of personal memories of a teacher who many of us have already begun to speak of as a legend but also the history of our discipline which he has helped shape, along with Julia Lesage and John Hess, through *JUMP CUT*. Letters flowed in, indeed, from students and colleagues--over thirty of them. It has been absolutely delightful to go through them and discover patterns that run through three decades of Chuck's teaching

Given a career of 30 some years, Chuck exhibits remarkable productivity in teaching: 141 courses taught at Northwestern since 1977 and 41 dissertations directed. His other professional work is also extensive: co-editor of *JUMP CUT: A Review of Contemporary Media* since 1974; 28 essays in anthologies; 13 journal articles; 19 articles in *JUMP CUT*; 23 reviews and columns; 82 pieces of reportage, introductions, and interviews; 7 videos and 21 films; over 160 lectures and conference papers/presentations, many of those reaching beyond the discipline to broader higher education audiences and the general public. A review of his publications and teaching shows a sustained intellectual engagement with understanding the nature of contemporary mass culture in its aesthetic, cultural, institutional, social and economic dimensions, and equally the possibilities of alternative media: from activists, artists, subcultures, political and cultural radicals.

Chuck has spent the last thirty or so years in the academy as a kind of Robin Hood figure; one whose primary weapon is a sharp-edged intellect. He is rigorous in seeking social justice and equality of opportunity while satiric in revealing the absurdities of misused power. Chuck routinely debunks academic sacred cows by tackling subjects considered too marginal or risqué for the classroom, bringing theory down to its use value, and demystifying academic phenomena such as conferences, tenure, and getting a job. Yet he is always genial and generous in sharing knowledge and offering access to all his students. Prof. Christine List recalls,

His classroom was also a demanding and exciting environment where we were expected to bring our own knowledge and ideas to the table, to engage in a rigorous critique of films and readings with fellow students. His classroom was a place where women and students of color could feel as though our intellects were finally being recognized and challenged.

Students, particularly graduate students, are drawn to his demystification of academic life because they are at its bottom—a source of “cheap labor and tuition dollars,” as Chuck explained in 1973, while a graduate student himself, in a comic strip drawn anonymously (so as “to protect the artist during his prelims”) in the campus underground newspaper *Common Sense*. The article asked the basic question graduate students are too insecure to ask: why do their professors verbally distort relatively simple ideas into complex, unrecognizable forms? As a teacher, Chuck is simply too secure and committed to education to rest on such pretentious tactics to win the respect of his students. Instead, he engaged us as fellow-learners, inviting us to make theory our own by showing that it could be a useful tool to understand and transform the world. For instance, in one class Ramona Curry handed in a newspaper clipping about the widespread circulation of copies of a sex-tape of the local sheriff and his wife. The sheriff, from Ramona's hometown, had inadvertently returned a VCR to the local video store with the tape still inside it. Ramona offered this news as a discussion starter for Walter Benjamin's thesis of the loss of aura in

the age of mechanical reproduction. Eric Hoyt (Northwestern BS '05) writes that Chuck transformed his thinking about film, changing it from a strictly formalist and aesthetic perspective to seeing the cultural, historical, and political implications of cinema.

Prof. Aaron Anderson speaks for all of us who have studied with Chuck when he says, "To this day, as a teacher, I strive to emulate Dr. Kleinhans' pedagogy in all my classes, for the best gifts he gave me were the ability to find my own voice and the courage to share my knowledge with others (regardless of what are sometimes considered disciplinary boundaries)." Chuck initiated and was involved in several interdisciplinary ventures at Northwestern: among them, the Documentary Interest Group (student-faculty colloquium), Ford Foundation Integrated Arts project (1988-90), and the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Theatre and Drama, as well as having close ties to Performance Studies, Gender Studies, and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. His students regularly came from Sociology, Anthropology, Performance Studies, and Comparative Literature. Prof. Michelle Citron calls him a "nimble crosser of boundaries" who integrated theory and production both in his teaching and creative work, mentored MFAs as well as Ph.Ds. Chuck's commitment to interdisciplinary study as the best way to approach media culture has been longstanding—a position that has now gone mainstream. What is truly striking is his student-centered conviction that interdisciplinary study is, ultimately, the best way to develop a person's full potential. Amongst his papers, I found him arguing to the Comparative Literature chair in a memo written in 1987:

I believe, that once a student is admitted to a program of graduate study, the major obligation of the faculty is to maximize growth and development of that student, not to sort and stratify them. Our programs are small enough that we should be able to see each student as unique and full of individual potentials we can encourage, particularly in inherently interdisciplinary and cross cultural contexts.

Professor Tracy Davis, director of NU's Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama elaborates:

His early background in theatre studies enabled Chuck to understand the analytical paradigms of the theatre studies and to help students utilize their knowledge in relation to cinema and cultural studies more generally. He has taught large numbers of our doctoral students the fundamentals of film analysis and critical theory, and had significant impact on their research through specialized courses ranging from experimental cinema to the classics of Hollywood... This has enriched the students' analysis of theatre, nuanced their ability to articulate methodological concerns about video and other records of live performance, and broadened both the range of evidence they brought to bear on their dissertations and the critical tools they deployed in analysis.

Chuck's mentoring has continued long after the students have left and extends well beyond his students to the wider film and media studies community through his editorial work on *Jump Cut* and recently *Cinema Journal*. Hamid Naficy recounts that he came to know Chuck, about twenty years ago when still a grad student, through a contribution he made to *Jump Cut* about Iranian cinema, a subject not then known to the field. *Jump Cut* has remained on the cutting edge of engaged, critical, and positioned media criticism, discussing non-Western, cross-cultural, experimental and Third Cinema, class, gender, race, and sexuality much before the more mainstream academic journals picked them up.

Chuck inspired students to take charge of their education and, as Jane Gaines recalls, pioneered the teaching of feminist film theory "before there was a female professor in the department." His students include a who's who of feminist theorists, including Ellen Seiter, Jane Gaines, Gina Marchetti, Chris Staayer, Ramona Curry, Nina Martin and many others. Some organized the "Feminar" a graduate seminar and the Lolita

Raclin Rogers Memorial Conference in 1978, the first feminist film conference in the U.S. Long before Blackboard, Chuck encouraged peer-based autonomous study through journals shared online and before that through xeroxed reports of each day. This has led to life-long friendships and solidarity amongst Chuck's students creating a large extended family that is scattered all over the globe and traverses at least three decades. Professor L. S. Kim describes Chuck's pedagogy this way:

Chuck possesses great skill in harnessing and directing the eagerness of graduate students, which I witnessed when we were colleagues at Northwestern. He accomplishes this in three ways: First, he affirms an individual's personal inquiry into a subject matter, offering encouragement yet demanding rigor. Second, he provides information and ideas in a way that positions him on equal ground with a young scholar, grooming her or him to understand themselves as colleagues rather than underlings. And third, he is extremely open-minded in the forms that final projects take, for example, he accepts production assignments in his Critical Studies courses thereby facilitating that sought-after "bridge between theory and practice" in the fact of his teaching, and in the ways in which his students develop their relationship to Cinema and Media Studies. Chuck literally and figuratively invites new blood into academic life for the advancement of new scholars, and moreover, for the advancement of the field itself.

Such openness and creativity have a similar effect on junior faculty, as I have experienced first hand. His mentorship does not end when a formal relationship ends; it blossoms into friendship, which is the highest form of collegiality.

"I learned from Chuck," Kate Kane writes, "to be courageous in class, to be willing to try something unorthodox, and at the same time to consider how to make the classroom a safe place to study difficult subjects and he is a real star when it comes to feminist, queer, and class questions." Gretchen Bisplinghoff remembers Chuck for fighting battles at the peril of his own career, for the rights of women students to equal financial aid, teaching assistantships, and providing the foundations for feminist/queer scholarship. J.B. Capino sums it up: As a lifelong activist Chuck could always be counted upon to stand up for labor issues of teaching assistants and other sensitive university politics.

"Northwestern may have been a privileged oasis on the shores of Lake Michigan" writes David Douglas now teaching at Concordia, but for Chuck it was always important that his students find ways to connect their university experience to those who lived elsewhere. Chris List recalls that when she first met him he had just returned from Nicaragua where he had been living with a family, videotaping and learning about Central American media and culture through the Contra attacks. Chuck encouraged his students to extend their education in media studies to incorporate political intervention and activism. As PhD students, Gabriel Gomez and Elspeth Kydd made films about AIDS and queer activism in Chicago, and Gabriel's dissertation was the first history of AIDS activist media. In Chicago, Chuck is well known to the independent film community and has exhibited work and delivered lectures to the general public in places as varied as Chicago Filmmakers and the Art Institute.

His commitment to an international perspective is seen in his dissertation students in national origins and topics. Twelve dissertations are based in international, cross-cultural, and minority analysis. Seven students represent other nations (Canada 3, India 2, Korea 2, Hong Kong, PRC, Philippines, Turkey. Two of his students were African American and one Mexican-American. Ten of his students explicitly wrote on feminist topics; two on queer subjects. 27 of his 41 PhDs are women. His letter writers consistently stress that while Chuck is an intellectual leader, he does not create disciples. J.B. Capino observes;

An aspect of his mentoring that bears noting is its radically non-coercive dynamic. While Chuck is one of the most politically committed academics I know, he never once pushed his stance or scholarly agenda on me or anyone I know. This stern avoidance of discipleship—so rare in academia because it requires such great humility—is certainly one (very important) reason why Chuck has produced scholars who share some of his interests but pursue radically different research agendas.

Mark Kerins adds:

Over the course of my years at Northwestern, I had innumerable personal conversations with Chuck (almost about any time his door was open, he was up to brainstorm, discuss ideas, or even just shoot the breeze), covering everything from my research, to my writing, to my own worries about where I "fit into" the broad field of film studies. Throughout this relationship (and my entire dissertation process) he served in a wide variety of roles - friend, teacher, boss, mentor, and so on - and somehow always knew what I most needed at any one time. Most importantly to me, in general he let me find my own way through the lengthy process of selecting my topic, researching it, and writing about it, while providing guidance and pushes in a particular direction at precisely those moments I most needed them. In other words, I always felt like I had someone watching over me and making sure I was on the right track, but never felt like I was being pushed to follow someone else's agenda. Indeed, while my particular dissertation topic was outside of any of Chuck's specific areas of expertise, he found that exciting - where many other faculty might have been loathe to take on an advisee whose interests were so different from their own, he was happy to help me work on a project that was interesting to me regardless of whether it fit his own research agenda.

A teacher of teachers, as his colleagues, Manju Pendakur and Lynn Spigel describe him, Chuck taught us how to critique, teach, develop curriculum, and, evaluate students in a rigorous and supportive manner. He always urged his TAs to develop original materials and discussions using their own interests and expertise. He required them to develop original lectures for the entire class. He also pioneered the use of computers for creative work and showed TAs how to use this new technology in teaching.

Ting Wang, a recent PhD from China, reports:

Working with Prof. Kleinhans as a TA is equally fulfilling. I was his TA in spring 2003 for his course "Hollywood in the 1990s". He walked me through the entire process of designing a course, developing a full syllabus, and taught me how to conduct effective class presentations, mentor students, and do fair and balanced grading. He conducted productive teacher training workshops for all TAs on a regular basis, and introduced us to innovative teaching techniques and urged us to keep up with state-of-the-art multimedia teaching methods. He also encouraged us to become versatile teachers with not only knowledge but also an eager mind to learn new things and the ability to adapt to the constantly changing media environment.

Chuck has no patience with pretension or academic timidity. At the same time Chuck had infinite patience and faith in his students. "Chuck believed in me," Tony Perrine, writes "and supported me as I gained confidence in my intellectual abilities. A working class kid from Flint, Michigan and a single mother of two young children, my prospects for finishing a Ph.D. did not look too promising, but Chuck never expected anything else." Zehra Tulin Serto, now a documentary maker in Turkey, remembers a long snowy afternoon in Chicago when Chuck went over her final dissertation draft, standing for hours because of a back injury that made it too painful to sit down. This is the extent to which Chuck's students see his stamp on their own work, see him in their own labor because Chuck put us ahead of his own career.

Perhaps because when he completed his PhD in Comparative Literature in 1973, he entered a limited job market, Chuck has always been sensitive to professional training. He worked as a community organizer, bus driver, and part-time lecturer teaching remedial composition and English as a second language before being appointed at Northwestern. He sometimes remarks

that he was always an intellectual (founding JUMP CUT) even if not employed as an academic. Throughout his years of teaching he offered workshops on getting published, giving good conference papers, applying for and interviewing for jobs. This mentorship was not just for “his” students but for the entire graduate cohort and extended to grads in Performance Studies and Theatre/Drama.

I end by echoing Gina Marchetti that as Chuck Kleinhans moves into phased retirement this is an excellent opportunity for the entire film community to thank him for his contribution to teaching. This expression of gratitude come not only from us undergraduate and graduate students, but so many others in the profession who have been touched by his commitment to social justice and political change. L. S. Kim sums it up:

- . Chuck Kleinhans displays both wisdom and humility, and he expresses a steady critical stance of our field yet a simultaneous loyalty to it. His mentorship of so many people is a testament to his kindness, tenacity, and above all, to the belief he has in Cinema and Media Studies – that it can lead towards political change, towards a change in consciousness, and towards a greater justice. He has imparted this drive upon me as well as others, and through our own work, it has become a pedagogical directive in the teaching of hundreds of students. As with the best pedagogical strategies, the learning becomes self-generating. Outstandingly, a great deal of learning began with, and continues to thrive because of Professor Chuck Kleinhans. I give thanks for such leadership and inspiration.

Our Robin Hood teacher can also look like Santa Claus.